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ABSTRACT

A study examined the effect of national culture and institutional tradition on the response of engineering companies and their management to product-technology and market changes in the United Kingdom in the 1980s. Data were collected from semistructured interviews of managers at 24 small, medium, and large engineering firms. The introduction of microelectronics into engineering products in the United Kingdom was found to coincide with a crisis regarding mass production markets that in turn led to increased competition and customer expectations. These developments, coupled with an increase in automation and use of computer-aided design and computer-aided engineering, resulted in greater emphasis on design rather than manufacturing capability, with design and production becoming increasingly separate activities. The human resources strategies of the companies studied generally placed too much emphasis on graduate recruitment rather than on training technicians to fill the same roles. The popular conception of a skills shortage in light of recent technological advances was found to be simplistic; instead, advances in engineering technology have created a need for more broadly trained hybrid engineers with a high level of product awareness and appropriate management strategies to handle the required human resources development. (Contains 122 references.) (MN)

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